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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 005625

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE (MENUTTI); EB/TPP (CEKUTA); AF/S  
ROME PASS FODAG

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [ZA](#) [RP](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [ZA](#) [RP](#) [VT](#) [VTPREL](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON'S MEETING ON BIOTECH WITH  
HOLY SEE PM EQUIVALENT LEONARDO SANDRI  
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1. (U) SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR CALLED ON HOLY SEE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER EQUIVALENT LEONARDO SANDRI NOVEMBER 16 TO EXPRESS U.S. CONCERN OVER THE LACK OF HOLY SEE INVOLVEMENT REGARDING THE GROWING THREAT OF HUNGER AND STARVATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND, SPECIFICALLY, THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S REJECTION OF U.S. FOOD ASSISTANCE BECAUSE OF ITS BIO-TECH CONTENT. AFTER HEARING THE DETAILS OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, AND IN RESPONSE TO THE AMBASSADORS' FORCEFUL PLEA FOR THE HOLY SEE TO STEP FORWARD IN RESPONSE TO THIS CLEAR MORAL ISSUE, SANDRI SAID HE WOULD DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH PRIME MINISTER EQUIVALENT SODANO AND FOREIGN MINISTER TAURAN AND GET BACK TO THE AMBASSADOR THIS WEEK WITH A RESPONSE. TO INCREASE THE PRESSURE ON THE HOLY SEE, THE AMBASSADOR ALSO PUBLISHED AN OP-ED IN ITALY'S LARGEST CATHOLIC DAILY NEWSPAPER, AVVENIRE, OUTLINING THE MORAL DIMENSIONS OF THE ISSUE AND URGING THE WORLD COMMUNITY TO FEED THE HUNGRY FOOD RATHER THAN FEAR.

2. (U) IN A NOVEMBER 16 MEETING WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER EQUIVALENT ARCHBISHOP LEONARDO SANDRI, AMBASSADOR OUTLINED U.S. CONCERNS OVER THE MOUNTING FOOD CRISIS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AND THE BAFFLING DECISION OF THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT TO REJECT U.S. FOOD ASSISTANCE OUT UNJUSTIFIED FEARS OF BIOTECH FOODS. THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT, IN THE FACE OF THE GRAVE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IT CURRENTLY FACES, THE GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA HAD ASKED THAT THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM REMOVE U.S. MAIZE FROM THE COUNTRY EVEN THOUGH MILLING THE GRAIN WOULD COMPLETELY ADDRESS THE CONCERNS THEY HAVE PUBLICLY CITED FOR NOT ACCEPTING THE GRAIN. THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT  
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THE UNCONSTRUCTIVE, POTENTIALLY LIFE-THREATENING ROLE PLAYED BY THE JESUIT CENTER FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN ZAMBIA, WHICH HAD ENCOURAGED THE GOVERNMENT TO REJECT BIOTECH FOODS, AND ALSO NOTED THAT ZAMBIA'S CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN ZAMBIA HAVE BEEN LARGELY SILENT IN THE FACE OF THIS CRISIS. WITH LIVES AT RISK, THE AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED, THE U.S. BELIEVED THE HOLY SHOULD FOLLOW THE UN, THE WHO, AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN ISSUING PUBLIC STATEMENTS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THE SAFETY FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION OF THE U.S. MAIZE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDING THE HUNGRY, ADDING THAT THE HOLY SEE'S STRONG MORAL VOICE ON THIS ISSUE COULD POTENTIALLY HELP SAVE THOUSANDS OF LIVES.

3. (U) IN RESPONSE, SANDRI ASKED IF THE U.S. WAS PROVIDING THE FOOD FREE OR SELLING THE FOOD. THE AMBASSADOR SAID IT WAS PROVIDED TO THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM FREE OF CHARGE, ADDING THAT WE PROVIDE NEARLY 70 PERCENT OF THE FOOD TO THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA. WITH THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA WORSENING AND DEMANDS ON DONORS INCREASING, DECISIONS TO WITHHOLD U.S.-SUPPLIED FOOD RELIEF WOULD HAVE A POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING EFFECT, THE AMBASSADOR NOTED.

4. (SBU) COMPARING THE HOLY SEE'S AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN BISHOPS SILENCE WITH THE CLEAR STATEMENTS OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND COUNTRIES, THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT "EVEN GREENPEACE HAD CAVED IN AND SAID, IN LIGHT OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES WITH PEOPLE STARVING THEY COULD NO LONGER SUSTAIN THEIR POSITION AGAINST FEEDING PEOPLE BIOTECH FOODS." WITH EVEN GREENPEACE SHOWING THEIR  
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COMPASSION IN THIS SITUATION, THE AMBASSADOR ASKED, "WHERE IS THE CHURCH"?

5. (SBU) SANDRI RESPONDED BY ASSERTING THAT THE EUROPEAN UNION WAS AGAINST BIOTECH FOODS AND THAT WAS PROBLEMATIC FOR THE HOLY SEE. THE AMBASSADOR CLARIFIED THAT THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION HAD APPROVED FOR COMMERCIALIZATION A NUMBER OF GM PRODUCTS, AND NOTED THAT OBJECTIONS RELATED MORE TO HOW TO STRUCTURE COMMERCIALIZATION RATHER THAN CONCERN OVER THE SAFETY OF

BIOTECH FOODS. HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT THE HOLY SEE'S SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS, THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE, HAVE TOLD US THEY FOUND NOTHING WRONG WITH THIS FOOD, AND HAVE ISSUED REPORTS TO THAT EFFECT. IN CLOSING, THE AMBASSADOR SAID HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT THE POPE, WITH HIS EMPHASIS ON THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE AND HIS OPPOSITION TO EUTHANASIA AND ABORTION, KNOWS OF THIS SERIOUS SITUATION AND IS NOT EQUALLY OPPOSED TO

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	AGRE-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	DINT-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	ITCE-00	DOTE-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	ED-01	EXME-00	E-00
	FAAE-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	FDRE-01	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01
	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00
	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	NSF-01	OES-00	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PER-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00
	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00
	USIE-00	EPAE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00
	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/015W				

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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
INFO AMEMBASSY ROME  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
USEU BRUSSELS  
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA  
AMEMBASSY HARARE  
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA  
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO  
AMEMBASSY LUANDA  
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE  
AMEMBASSY MANILA

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STARVATION.  
[16.](#) (U) AT THIS POINT, SANDRI AGREED TO CONFER WITH PRIME MINISTER EQUIVALENT SODANO AND FM TAURAN, AND SUBSEQUENTLY WITH THE PAPAL NUNCIO IN ZAMBIA THIS WEEK. HE PLEDGED TO GET BACK TO THE AMBASSADOR AFTER THESE CONSULTATIONS.  
[17.](#) (SBU) THE AMBASSADOR DEFINITELY GOT SANDRI'S ATTENTION. HE VISIBLY WINCED WHEN HE POINTED OUT THE CONTRAST BETWEEN GREENPEACE AND THE HOLY SEE.  
NICHOLSON

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